

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

HEREDITARY

Bloomfield, Paul. *Uncommon People: A Study of England's Elite.* London, 1955. Hamish Hamilton. Pp. xi+210. Price 21s.

THIS book fulfils its intriguing title. It does not seek to establish any thesis except that enunciated in 1821 by Hazlitt and adopted by Galton and now universally accepted, that character is inherited no less than physical features, but it sets out in an attractive manner a great deal of interesting evidence. The author as the basis for his book traces the fortune of the descendants of five sires, not all of them founders of families in the conventional sense, and owing to their distinction and importance he has the opportunity to make some illuminating comments on English social and intellectual life at various epochs besides furnishing many interesting pieces of information about individuals. Though this is a book to read for pleasure, not to study for exams, the author treats his subject with a philosophical accuracy which is a model: he traces descent equally through male and female lines, avoiding the fallacy of regarding only a man's patrilinear descendants as his family because they bear the same name, of which the classic example is the popular idea of the Stuart family; he steers his way between the old-fashioned idea that the highest social classes constitute the true aristocracy and the equally erroneous modern view that all men are equal and there is no value in having a class of persons holding a hereditary position; and he makes allowance for the fact that apart from inheriting ability the children of distinguished parents have a better chance of success than have others.

The immediate descendants of Sir George Villiers, the first of his sires, married into such a number of important families that it was inevitable that their progeny should

include a number of people distinguished in English politics. This point could not have been more amusingly expressed than in the speech by one of them, Lord Granville, in the House of Lords about a hundred years ago. But the number of distinguished descendants of Sir George is too remarkable to be accounted for except by the influence of heredity: all the leaders of British resistance to aggression, John Churchill Duke of Marlborough, the elder and younger Pitt, Castlereagh and Winston Churchill were among his descendants. Perhaps even more striking are achievements of the family of a more questionable character. Sir George was father of the first Duke of Buckingham who had a face like an angel and thereby captivated King James I and continued while he lived to exercise his influence over Charles I. His grandniece was Barbara Villiers who became one of the leading mistresses of Charles II. A descendant of Sir George in the fourth generation Arabella Churchill was mistress of James II and, more strange still, Elizabeth Villiers Barbara's first cousin was mistress of William III. Accordingly members of Sir George's family had high influence at Court in five successive reigns. Since reigning monarchs select as mistresses those they desire, the post is obtained by charm rather than influence, and charm of so high a degree is inborn and not acquired by study.

In some ways Robert Barclay is more worthy of study as an ancestor even than Sir George Villiers. He was an early Quaker who walked through Aberdeen clothed in sackcloth for a sign and was the ancestor of many who, after quakerism had become respectable, became eminent as financiers, philanthropists and even politicians. I would like to add to the many mentioned in this book, Sydney Lord Buxton's only son Denis who was an exceptionally able young man and was killed in the first Great War. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the

effect on English social life and on the economic life of the whole world of the fact that quakers took up banking: the English banker was recognized as a respectable and honourable character quite different from the East European money-handlers with whom Karl Marx and Lasalle were only too painfully familiar. It was only natural that members of the family since they retained their beliefs after they had acquired money and influence should take a leading part in abolishing slavery and in initiating prison reform.

The descendants of Thomas Wedgwood the potter, who was great-grandfather of Charles Darwin, and even more, those of James Stephen flourished in more recent times and are therefore in a sense of almost greater interest though we have not the pleasure of tracing them through the centuries as we can the descendants of Sir George Villiers.

Only one of Mr. Bloomfield's five sires seems not entirely satisfactory. In the last hundred years or so the Cecils have been more conspicuous in public life than any other noble family of the same standing, and the founders of the family in Tudor times are world famous, but there is a gap of more than two hundred years between—so much so that the daughter and biographer of the Victorian Prime Minister said that it would be idle to suggest that his great abilities were inherited from the Cecils of Queen Elizabeth I's reign.

CECIL BINNEY.

FERTILITY

Harrison, R. G., Editor, *Studies on Fertility*. Oxford, 1955. Blackwell. Pp. ix+148 Price 25s.

UNDER the able editorship of Professor R. G. Harrison we can welcome with confidence the second volume of papers by workers (scientific, veterinary and clinical) interested in reproduction. Most of the papers published here were read at the annual conference of the Society for the Study of Fertility held at Birmingham in June, 1955. The first seven papers are

concerned with the male and the remaining seven with the female.

C. W. Taylor and Dorothy Shotton (Apparent Aspermia due to Retrograde Ejaculation) describe two cases of apparent azoospermia which proved later to be due to retrograde ejaculation of the semen into the bladder. By careful adjustment of the urinary pH by giving potassium citrate numerous motile sperm were recovered from the urine. In one case these were used successfully for artificial insemination of the wife.

Clare Harvey (Cytological Events in the Human Testis in Relation to Abnormalities in Sperm Morphology) traces the development of abnormal spermatozoa, in particular those with pear or spindle heads, and suggests that these may be the product of undivided secondary spermatocytes. The work which is based on a detailed study of some forty-seven testicular biopsies from grossly subfertile men compared with smears of ejaculated semen, not necessarily from the same patients, is a valuable contribution to cytological studies of the testis; the paper is beautifully illustrated with line drawings and microphotographs.

Three papers come from the Liverpool School of Anatomy.

R. Harris and R. G. Harrison (The Effect of Low Temperature on the Guinea Pig Testis) compare the effect of exposing the testis to cold, with and without the scrotal covering. Complete destruction of the spermatogenic epithelium follows one hour's exposure to -3.5 deg. C. if the scrotum is absent, but when it is intact a temperature of -11 deg. C. is necessary to produce any effect. The difference is related to the internal temperature of the testis, and the damage is probably mainly the result of ischaemia due to the freezing of the blood in the testicular artery.

J. H. Grant (The Effect of Testosterone Propionate on the Chronic Ischaemic Testis in the Rat) shows that the degenerative changes following partial ischaemia are accelerated by injections of testosterone propionate in direct proportion to the size of the dose.